DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 415 530 CS 509 653

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TITLE Leadership, Communicator Style, and Gender: A Propositional Analysis.
PUB DATE 1997-11-00
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association (83rd, Chicago, IL, November 19-23, 1997).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Effectiveness; Communication Problems; Communication Research; *Communication Skills; Interpersonal Communication; *Leadership; Literature Reviews; *Organizational Communication; Sex Differences; *Sex Role
IDENTIFIERS *Communicator Style; *Gender Issues; Management Skills; Propositional Analysis; Prototypes

ABSTRACT

This essay is a propositional analysis of the literature on the interrelationship of communicator style and gender as evidenced in the organizational setting. Pavitt's (1989) notion of the prototype is extended to the realm of organizational communication in developing five propositions: (1) the prototype of the effective manager is more likely to influence perceptions of individuals in the organizational setting than are gender stereotypes; (2) however, other studies indicate that our notion of the prototype of a leader/manager/superior is gendered; (3) the prototypical female manager is more collaborative relative to the prototypical male manager; (4) a gendered prototype may negatively affect women in the organizational setting; and (5) a cultural/diversity model that moves beyond gender can help to eliminate the gender gap. (Contains 54 references.) (Author)

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ED 415 530

Running Head: LEADERSHIP, STYLE, AND GENDER

Leadership, Communicator Style, and Gender:

A Propositional Analysis

Commission on Training and Development

National Communication Association Convention

November 1997

Chicago, IL

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Abstract

This essay is a propositional analysis of the literature on the interrelationship of communicator style and gender as evidenced in the organizational setting. Pavitt's notion of the prototype is extended to the realm of organizational communication in developing five propositions. (1) The prototype of the effective manager is more likely to influence perceptions of individuals in the organizational setting than are gender stereotypes. (2) However, other studies indicate that our notion of the prototype of a leader/manager/superior is gendered. (3) The prototypical female manager is more collaborative relative to the prototypical male manager. (4) A gendered prototype may negatively affect women in the organizational setting, and (5) A cultural/diversity model that moves beyond gender can help to eliminate the gender gap

Leadership, Communicator Style, and Gender:
A Propositional Analysis

Research on women in organizational settings begins trivially with studies on how to "dress for success" (Kleiner, 1983) or on conversational differences between women and men (Bischoping, 1993). As women begin to move into management positions, the amount of research increases, focusing on communication needs and how to manage home and the workplace. However, the majority of the research concerns itself with the differing needs of men and women in the workplace, much of it asserting that women should develop more masculine traits to succeed in the "rough and tumble" world of business. Just recently, the research on women in the workplace has shifted from a model of difference to a model of cultural/diversity training, focusing on the skills women and men bring to the workplace. Yet this research is clearly overshadowed by the numerous studies which have emphasized the perceived differences between women and men.

This essay is a review of the literature on the interrelationship of communicator style and gender as evidenced in the organizational setting. Guiding this study are the questions: What, if any, differences are perceived in the communicator style of women and men in the organizational setting and what effect do perceived differences have on individual effectiveness in the workplace? This analysis considers any study published in communication journals and business journals with a communication focus done between the years 1979 to the present, however, it also includes two 1974 studies and one 1976 study. Several databases were used to begin the study. PsychLit, SocioFile, Business Index, MLA, EXAC, Lexis/Nexis, and the

internet as well as the most recent edition of Matlon's Index to Journals in Communication Studies. In addition, the following terms were targeted in several combinations: gender, women, communication, communicator style, organization, and business. An initial working bibliography, consisting of several hundred potential studies to use for this propositional analysis, was obtained from the data bases as well as bibliographies. However, given the parameters of the assignment as well as manageability, a narrower focus was necessary. I began to eliminate sources on situations other than the formal organizational setting (e.g., marriage, health, media). In addition, any sources which could be considered popular rather than scholarly were eliminated as well as studies from Europe and studies involving children. While still having well over one hundred sources, I began to make more serious eliminations. A final decision was made to eliminate books as well as psychology and sociology journals. As indicated by the word grid (see Appendix A), this propositional analysis is based on approximately 45 primary studies from communication and business journals on the relationship between communicator style and gender in the organizational setting. Realizing that the last "elimination round" was a serious one, any future research must take into account books as well as journals in psychology and sociology.

The propositions discovered revolve around the notion of the prototype as developed by Pavitt and Haight (1985, 1986) and further evaluated by Pavitt (1989). Loosely defined, the prototype concept suggests that individuals possess an "implicit theory" of the communicatively competent individual that they use to assess others as well as themselves. I extend Pavitt's notion of the prototype to the realm of organizational communication in

developing five propositions. (1) The prototype of the effective manager is more likely to influence judgments of individuals in the organizational setting than are gender stereotypes, (2) However, other studies indicate that our notion of the prototype of a leader/manager/superior is gendered, (3) The prototypical female manager is more collaborative than the prototypical male manager, (4) A gendered prototype may negatively affect women in the organizational setting, and (5) A cultural/diversity model that moves beyond gender can help to eliminate the gender gap. As my propositions progress I also develop the argument that the value of the prototype may be a negative one when it is focused on individuals. Instead, as Rosener (1995) argues, a shift in the organizational culture from one that values gendered contributions differently to one that finds value in the various contributions of individuals could be beneficial to all.

I. The prototype of the effective manager is more likely to influence perceptions of individuals in the organizational setting than are stereotypes regarding gender.

Andrews (1984) and Bunji and Andrews (1985) in their research on college students who participated in group discussions indicate that persons who are perceived as having more skills are the emergent group leaders. In particular, prototypical leadership skills are identified as task oriented and problem solving skills as well as giving opinions which lead the group to task accomplishment. In addition, performance self esteem is indicated as the overall predictor of leadership emergence. If the participants possess a high level of self esteem, the authors posit that those individuals are more likely to participate in the group discussion in the first place. While the 1985 study does indicate that the gender of the group members comprising

the majority of the group could be a factor in predicting the gender of the emergent leader, the overall assessment is that gender is less important than self esteem and skill as perceived by group members in predicting leadership emergence.

In an early study in gender research, Miner (1974a, 1974b) suggests that there is no difference in the motivation of female managers as compared to that of male managers. Both genders perceive themselves to be equally successful and equally motivated to take on management positions. Further, college students with high motivation to manage are indeed going into management professions. In addition, Harlan and Weiss (1982) claim that male and female managers have similar overall psychological profiles as determined by self perceptions as well as interviews. Thus, the prototype of the successful manager possesses not only problem solving and task completion skills, but also stable personality characteristics not influenced by gender.

In studies of managers' use of power, Ragins (1989) posits that regardless of gender, individuals prefer that male and female managers use referent and expert power bases. This finding is based on a questionnaire on perceived power and leadership. Previously, Solomon, Brehony, Rothblum, and Kelly (1982) analyzed tape recordings of men and women in the business setting and their findings also indicate a power preference, that the self-effacing approach is not preferred in either gender. Finally, Hirokawa, Kodema, and Harper (1990) in a study of men and women managers who have equal power in the organization to fire subordinates, find that managers more often use punishment-based strategies when taking action with a subordinate. With this, power bases become part of the prototypical manager.

Related to the issue of power, an "Editorial" in Business Week (1994, October 24) suggests that speech styles depend on the status difference between the speaker and the audience, not gender. In particular, this editorial takes issue with Deborah Tannen's book You Just Don't Understand that explores speech differences between men and women. The "Editorial" asserts that women must not blame their lack of success on their speech style, but instead must search for access to networks and mentors, for example, in order to gain power within the organization. For, with increased power and tenure with the organization, gender related differences in task related values diminishes, according to a study conducted by Gomez-Mejia (1983). Finally, Donnell and Hall (1980) in a study of managers, indicate many similarities between men and women in their self perceptions of managerial philosophy, style, competence, motivation, and participation.

Based on the above research, the prototype of the effective manager is more likely to influence perceptions of individuals in the organizational setting than are stereotypes regarding gender. In particular, the effective manager is one who possesses task and problem solving skills, high self esteem, high effectance motivation and other stable personality characteristics, a varied repertoire of communicator style characteristics, and uses power bases effectively. However, other studies indicate that our prototypical notion of the effective leader not only possesses more specific characteristics, but also that those characteristics are gendered.

II. Our notion of the prototype of a leader/manager/superior is gendered

Three studies provide a more general notion of the competent communicator as gendered. First, Stephen and Harrison (1985) provide an example of a study which reinforces

cultural stereotypes In a study of 225 elementary school teachers who completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory, the study concludes that males tend to repress emotional expression, have confidence, and are willing to use manipulation while females perceive themselves as "smelling pleasant," using emotions, gossiping, and possessing a soft voice This study goes on to indicate that androgynous individuals have a more varied repertoire than do males or females Gudykinst and Lim (1985) in a study of self perceptions of communicator style determine that males rate themselves higher in the dominant, contentious, impression leaving, dramatic, and relaxed dimensions of the Norton Communicator Style measure than do women Finally, Duran and Carveth (1990) extend gendered prototypes as indicated above to the notion of communication competence Participants in this study were asked to fill out a semantic differential scale for each of the possible situations indicated by the statement "Valerie/Michael is more self assured/quiet " While the self assured trait produced a more competent rating than did quiet, the more significant conclusion was that Michael rated as more competent than Valerie regardless of the trait listed Thus, this research supports a claim that males are considered more competent than females and by extension masculine traits are considered more competent that are feminine traits

The research supporting gender stereotypes feeds our managerial prototype The work of Rosenfeld and Fowler (1976) develops democratic and autocratic models of male and female leadership styles The female democratic leader is emotional, helpful, and affectionate while the male democratic leadership style is forceful, intelligent, analytical, and indicative of a high moral-ethical self concept The autocratic leadership style is perceived more negatively

for each gender and is aggressive, revengeful, and desirous of being perceived as an authority. More obvious indications that gender stereotypes influence the managerial prototype are found in the research of Powell and Butterfield (1979) which indicates that 65% of male and female business students believe that a good manager possesses masculine traits. Finally, Wong, Kettlewell, and Sproule (1985) in a survey of 66 businesswomen ascertain that women in male dominated businesses are more likely to perceive they have masculine personality traits. Perhaps this is an attempt to circumvent the similarity-attraction hypothesis from the research of Tsui and O'Reilly (1989). This hypothesis purports that superiors are more likable who share demographic traits with the subordinate, including gender similarity. However, women who develop masculine traits to cope in the workplace are not always comfortable with their decision to do so as indicated by the findings of Sheppard (1989), which state that professional women perceive a conflict between appearing feminine and being businesslike, the "double bind," and the topic of a book length study by Jamieson (1995).

III. The prototypical female manager is more collaborative than the prototypical male manager.

A collaborative approach to leadership is in contrast to a more instrumental or control oriented approach. If a collaborative approach is used, more emphasis is placed on the people involved in the interaction. The leader attempts to involve everyone in the discussion in an open, friendly manner. Edelsky's 1981 study determines that women prefer this type of approach in meetings over a control oriented approach. Specifically, when a collaborative approach is used, women talk as much as men, whereas if one person is in charge, women do

not take part in the discussion as often. Baird and Bradley (1979) surveyed 150 subordinates and their findings show that subordinates perceive women supervisors as exceeding men in interpersonal relations and other receptiveness. In addition, such behavior was found to have a positive effect on employee morale. Baird and Bradley tentatively suggest that females may be more effective supervisors than the male managers in this study. Many of these findings are echoed by Berryman-Fink (1985), whose research also indicates that female managers are perceived to be more interpersonally competent. Specifically, women managers are perceived to be better listeners, verbally skilled, nonverbally astute, empathic, receptive, sensitive, honest, flexible, and personable than male managers. She suggests that the perceived differences indicate a need for men and women to discuss together what women do bring to the organizational setting and work toward behavior flexible management. However Berryman-Fink also indicates areas in which managers perceive women need training: assertiveness, confidence-building, public speaking, enhancing credibility and authority, professionalism, and controlling emotions. These traits are more stereotypically male, and Berryman-Fink suggests that women may simply need to learn to succeed in the male management atmosphere.

Other studies that support the collaboration model for women include Josefowitz (1980) whose conclusions indicate that women managers are more available to subordinates than are male managers based on observations as well as interviews, Smeltzer and Watson (1986) whose findings indicate that women managers use networking for social support, Lamude and Daniels (1984) who reveal that female subordinates perceive female managers as more dramatic and open than male managers based on Norton's Communication Style measure,

and Fowler and Rosenfeld (1979), who corroborate Rosenfeld and Fowler's (1976) findings that the male democratic leader is forceful, analytical, and utilitarian, while the female democratic leader is helpful, affectionate, and desirous of unity/stability.

When disciplining a non-compliant subordinate, three studies indicate women manager's other-oriented style. Harper and Hirokawa (1988) indicate that male managers use punishment strategies as opposed to women managers who are more likely to rely on altruism and rationale-based strategies when convincing a subordinate of an obligatory task. This finding is confirmed by Hirokawa, Kodama, and Harper (1990). Also, women managers are much slower to shift to coercive communication with non-compliant subordinates than are male managers as indicated by Conrad (1991).

Three studies indicate women managers' verbal collaboration skills during meeting situations. Kennedy and Camden (1982), while finding that women interrupt more than men during meetings, also indicate that women more often do the interrupting for the purposes of clarification or agreement, rather than disagreement or control. Smeltzer and Fann (1989) in research on verbal contributions, conclude that women managers use more disclaimers, interruptions, and attempted interruptions than male managers, indicating an attempt to take part in the collaboration. Finally, Haddock (1995) posits in a non-empirical study that powerful women encourage others to express themselves and empower others in the process. Much of this research indicates that a collaborative model indeed has a positive effect on the workplace environment, elevating morale and producing relationships. However, not all gendered prototypes are valued as productive.

IV. Gendered prototypes may negatively affect women in the organizational setting

As proposition two indicates, the prototype of the competent manager may indeed be modeled after masculine stereotypes. As a result, feminine characteristics are devalued in the workplace which has a negative effect on the morale and productivity of women. For example Brass (1985) discovers that men and women more often form gender-segregated networks in the workplace and that male networks are perceived as more influential than female networks. Recall the above study by Smeltzer and Watson (1986) that indicates that women managers use networking for social support, whereas men use networking for instrumental support. While social support may be more valuable for the workplace environment, it still seems that the bottom line is task accomplishment over relationship development. While this may be a practical need, it does not serve to value or advance a collaborative model which is more often used by women.

Siegerdt (1983) in a study involving almost 3000 participants based on the International Communication Association data bank, determines that women perceive they have less communication influence in the organization and are less satisfied with their communication even though they rely on more formal job communication. Perhaps this speaks again to the findings of Sheppard (1989) who confirms that professional women perceive a conflict between appearing feminine and being businesslike, the "double bind."

Dobbins, Long, Dedrick and Clemsons (1990) in a study about the role of self monitoring and gender on leader emergence ascertain that high self monitors emerge as leaders more often than low self monitors. The authors define self monitoring behavior as initiating

more structure and conforming to the leadership prototype held by the group. While this at first may appear to be unrelated to gender, the authors further indicate that men more often than women utilize high self monitoring behavior, thus women less often conform to the leadership prototype. The study moves on to claim that women are at an unfair disadvantage in becoming the leader of a mixed sex group. This study has serious implications for women emerging as successful leaders in the workplace.

Duerst-Lahti (1990) corroborates the unfair disadvantage claim specifically in a study of verbal contributions made by women in a decision making arena of mixed sex employees. While the overall verbal contributions of women are determined to be similar to men's, women had to expend extra effort simply to achieve the same ends. Interestingly, two of the women in this study held the highest positions in the organization, so status was not an indicator of verbal contributions. Furthermore, women took on more stereotypical functions such as recorder, even though their status was higher.

Similarly, research by Fairhurst (1993) finds that male group members construct a stereotypical role for their female leaders that is not challenged by the women in the group. Fairhurst tape recorded actual leader-member conversations and asked the participants to fill out questionnaires on participative decision making. While this study corroborates the findings indicating that women prefer a more collaborative model of workplace communication, it also indicates that when status inconsistency is present, the power of the leader is countered by the social power of the member. Instead of responding with legitimate authority, women

managers more often counter male members' challenges to their authority with ego-massage, face support, and collaboration.

Finally, Penley, Alexander, Jernigan, and Henwood (1991) surveyed mid and upper level bank managers and their findings indicate that female managers are more apprehensive about public communication and communication in general than are male managers. Additionally, women managers score higher on introversion than male managers and even have more difficulty in writing than men. While many factors could explain this phenomenon, one possible answer is that women are self conscious about measuring up to the managerial prototype which is gendered masculine. As a result they may feel that they are being evaluated or compared to the masculine prototype instead of valued for their individual contributions.

V. A model that moves beyond gender can help to eliminate the gender gap.

Seven non-empirical studies offer ways we may move beyond gender in order to bridge the gender-communication gap. Putnam (1982) suggests that research begin to look at cognitive style constructs rather than gender in order to break away from self-evident assumptions and gender stereotypes. In addition, Putnam asserts that gender research is "theoretically barren," necessitating that researchers ground their communication perspectives in context and process. Finally, Putnam suggests that while androgyny research has its limitations, it does provide a move to the study of multiple categories of gender identity.

Kenton (1989) makes a move to develop a new model of credibility to value women's contributions as well as men's. Instead of the two dimensional model consisting of trustworthiness and expertise, Kenton posits a four dimensional model which includes (1)

goodwill and fairness, (2) expertise, (3) prestige, and (4) self presentation. The author develops a possible research hypothesis which asserts that with training in self presentation, women's contributions will be valued as credible just as often as men's.

In "Communication: Bridging the Gender Gap," HR Focus (1994, April) suggests a general process to bridge the gender gap based on Dr. Judith Tingley's book Genderflex: Ending the Workplace War Between the Sexes. The main focus of the model is that it suggests acknowledging differences, but not making judgments based on them. Techniques for women and men to enhance their communication are also offered.

However, the most useful suggestion, as well as an apparent trend developing in the research, suggests that researchers conceptualize gender research as a culturally constructed arrangement of biology and social life (Rakow 1986). Brownell (1993) suggests a model of cross gender communication that explains the challenges of listening, gaining credibility, nonverbal and verbal communication. Kennedy and Everest (1991) explore the high context culture versus the low context culture and suggest that women are more comfortable in high context cultures whereas men are more comfortable in low context cultures. As a result, cross gender communication is conceptualized as intercultural communication. In addition, the authors also explore, for example, Asian culture as another high context culture, asserting that during the next ten years organizations are going to hire more minorities into the workplace and must learn to communicate effectively across cultures. In this model, individuals are valued for their contributions, not devalued for their differences. Finally, Rosener (1990) suggests that organizations begin developing and valuing leadership behaviors based on

"shared experiences of women" (p. 119) as contributions to the organizational culture. She generates a fundamental shift from focusing on individual differences within the workplace to focusing on the organization as a culture with a variety of valued participants.

Conclusions

Clearly, research on leadership and gender in the organizational setting is varied and at times contradictory as indicated by propositions one and two. Studies determining that gender is not an issue (proposition one), more often developed hypotheses based on this assumption. For example, high performance self esteem or a high level of skills will influence leadership emergence. Gender is not the primary focus of the hypotheses. In addition, these studies more often discovered more nuanced findings which were more beneficial for future research developments. Alternately, studies indicating that gender differences do exist developed hypotheses couched in this assumption. For example, masculine behaviors are perceived as more communicatively competent than female behaviors. In other words, difference studies went looking for differences and found them, merely serving to perpetuate gender stereotypes rather than move beyond them in a truly creative manner. It has only been within the last ten years that a diversity model has been acknowledged in addition to a model which privileges difference. However, with no empirical studies published in communication or business journals, this is a clear line of research just waiting to be explored. Until researchers become reflexive enough to consider the stereotypes that their research perpetuates, we will continue to have studies that conclude that men and women are different based on stereotypes. Until

alternative models of leadership are posited, we will still have research that perpetuates the managerial prototype that conforms to a stereotypical masculine model of competence.

While the research findings under proposition one have done more to expand our factual knowledge beyond stereotypes, clearly this research is in the minority. While the majority of research assumes difference along gender lines, that research is lacking in theoretical grounding. In addition, the Bem Sex Role Inventory is a common tool among researchers. However, its usefulness has been questioned. For example, Blanchard-Fields, Suhrer-Roussel, and Hertzog (1994) condemn studies of difference in gender research. In particular they assert that the BSRI can only account for global masculinity and femininity traits; however individuals are multi-dimensional. Thus the BSRI is inadequate as a research tool in gender inquiry, yet it is often relied upon. More development in research methods and theoretical underpinnings is needed in gender research. In addition, the field could benefit from more interdisciplinary work between communication scholars and sociologists, for example, to develop a cultural understanding of leadership and the way it is constructed. In addition, alternative models of leadership are necessary which find space for a collaboration model which would invite more women into managerial positions and eliminate some of the disadvantages already inherent in the current masculine prototype. The collaborative model values individuals in relationships and increases morale, and a logical extension is that productivity would also increase if the employees enjoy the workplace.

This particular study was limited in that it only considered studies from communication and business journals. As a result, the great wealth of books on gender and leadership were

not evaluated for this study. A trend in the research seems to be the development of book length studies or collections of essays (Rosener 1995, Billing and Alvesson 1994, Tanton 1994, Sekaran and Leong 1992, Woods 1988). In addition, numerous studies have been published in psychology and sociology journals that were not considered within the scope of this study.

This review attempted to extend Pavitt's notion of the prototype (1985, 1986, 1989) to the realm of organizational communication in developing five propositions. (1) The prototype of the effective manager is more likely to influence perceptions of individuals in the organizational setting than are gender stereotypes, (2) However, other studies indicate that our notion of the prototype of a leader/manager/superior is gendered, (3) The prototypical female manager is more collaborative than the prototypical male manager; (4) A gendered prototype may negatively affect women in the organizational setting; and (5) A cultural/diversity model that moves beyond gender can help to eliminate the gender gap. To come full circle we must return to the initial questions. What, if any, differences are perceived in the communication style of women and men in the organizational setting and what effect do perceived differences have on individual effectiveness in the workplace? Answered with propositions two through four, the explanation is not as important as realizing that this may not have been the most productive question to guide this analysis. As the development of the propositions suggest, the value of the prototype may be a negative one when it is focused on individuals. Instead, as proposition five suggests, a shift in the organizational culture from one that values gendered contributions differently to one that finds value in the various contributions of individuals could

be beneficial to all. Many opportunities for research exist in the field of gender and leadership in the organizational setting, research that hopefully will not continue to support gender stereotypes. This review is structured in such a way as to move the field in a more productive direction, one that challenges the assumptions that underlie our research and the questions we ask when conducting it.

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